

Biotics 101 by Luddleston

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Summary:

James wasn't sure how he got into this situation.

It wasn't even a normal James Vega situation, either, one that involved Cortez, a few too many shots, someone else's car, and hiding a cat in their dorm room. This was beyond his expertise in every manner of speaking. And there weren't even any cats.

There was, however, a guy pressing him against the wall and making out with him.

Featuring a Chemistry class from hell, a series of one-night stands, and one very exasperated Steve Cortez who is *done* trying to help James figure out his sexuality.

1. How to get into a "Situation": a guide by James Vega and Kaidan Alenko

Author's Note:

- For [SizzlyCrisp](#).

So, this is one of those kind-of-a-modern-AU things where it still takes place in the Mass Effect universe, but everyone is in college because COLLEGE AUS ARE GREAT ALRIGHT.

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It wasn't even a normal James Vega situation, either, one that involved Cortez, a few too many shots, someone else's car, and hiding a cat in their dorm room. This was beyond his expertise in every manner of speaking. And there weren't even any cats.

There was, however, a guy pressing him against the wall and making out with him.

James was normally not on the receiving end of the whole "shoved up against the wall and being tongue-fucked within an inch of his life" thing. He preferred to be the perpetrator in those instances, but *damn*, if this wasn't just as good. Sure, the stubble was weird and the fact that there were hard muscles under his hands instead of soft curves was weirder, but he wanted *more* of this, fuck.

Apparently, when he got drunk enough, he wasn't as straight as previously assumed. At least, judging by the way he was groping Kaidan Alenko's ass and sucking on his bottom lip.

He really wasn't aware how he got himself into this.

Well, he was a little aware. It had, at the very least, started with a conversation in Chem class where James had asked Kaidan if they could study that weekend, and Kaidan invited him to a party, then there had been

some drinks, some people levitating (because it was the Biotics dorm, of *course* people were levitating), and then he'd been flirting (because he was James Vega, of *course* he'd been flirting), and now, he was making out with Kaidan against a wall, and probably about to do more than just make out.

James was so okay with this. At least for now. He predicted he might be less okay the next morning.

Kaidan moaned a little. Oh, he was so okay with this for now.

James supposed in some ways, making out with a guy was nice. After all, Kaidan was close to the same height as him, so he didn't have to bend down at all to kiss him, and *oh, holy fuck*, Kaidan's dick was right up on his, that was weird as hell. It was a good weird as hell, though. Plus, it was nice knowing he wasn't the only one who was horny as fuck.

"Shit, are we gonna...?" James started to ask when Kaidan pulled back for a few seconds. Before he finished the end of his sentence, Kaidan kissed his neck, sucking hard enough to leave a bruise tomorrow. James took that as enough of an answer, and he slid one hand into the back of Kaidan's jeans and squeezed his ass.

Well. He supposed if he was gonna get laid tonight, it might as well be Kaidan.

They ended up in Kaidan's dorm room, which was much better-decorated than James', and had, like, actual mood lighting in the form of a string of white bulbs around the perimeter of the ceiling.

"My roommate's always gone on weekends," Kaidan said, and James didn't really register what he said until a few seconds later, because he was busy making sure Kaidan's neck matched his. He was pretty sure Kaidan liked it, too, if the way he rolled his head to the side to let James get at him was any indication. James rolled Kaidan's T-shirt up over his chest so he could feel him up, and *holy shit*, the guy had abs.

Kaidan took a step back, turned around and stripped off his shirt, then pulled on James's. "Get this off," he said, and his voice was even deeper

and raspier than normal, and James didn't know *why* that was such a turn-on, but he grabbed the back of his shirt and pulled it off over his head. Maybe it was just a sex-voice thing, like when a girl's voice got all breathy and high. It just... triggered something.

"God," Kaidan said, pressing his palms to the flat of James' chest. "Are we really gonna do this?"

"If you, I mean, if you want," James said, but Kaidan clearly *did* want, because he actually *licked* the curl of one of the tattoos on James' pectoral. "Holy shit, do that again," he said, and it all came out as one word and Kaidan did it again, going for the other tattoo this time. James grabbed him by the back of the neck and kissed him again. Kaidan held onto his hips while James walked him back the few steps it took to get them to the bed. Kaidan broke the kiss, sat down and popped open the button on his jeans, chuckling a little wildly and tugging James closer to him by his belt-loops.

"I'm actually doing this," James said, mostly to himself, looking down at Kaidan, who, in James' drunken haze, was looking pretty good. He was, well, hairier than James was used to, but damn, his lips were so perfect, and James knew exactly how good they felt on his. And how good they'd feel everywhere else. He knelt over Kaidan and kissed him again. Kaidan sucked on his bottom lip, dug in with his teeth a little. James rolled his hips against Kaidan's, thought about feeling him up. His fly was open and James wondered what it would feel like (he had an idea, at least, because he knew what his own dick felt like, but another guy's? It was weird that that was such a turn-on.

Kaidan was *hot*, like fever-hot, and James had his hands and mouth all over. He didn't go below the open waistband of his jeans, though, until Kaidan grabbed his wrist with one hand and tugged it down between his legs.

From there, things got a little fuzzy.

James woke up in the middle of the night with the beginnings of a hangover and Kaidan lying next to him (well, almost on top of him, it was a twin bed), curled onto his side, naked and covered in hickeys that James must have given him. "Fuck," James whispered, barely breathed the word around

the hand he clapped to his mouth. What the fuck, had he just banged some random guy from his Chem class? *Yes, James, you did just do that.* Not even a random girl. Random *guy*.

“Fuck,” he said, again, as he tried to get out of bed without disturbing Kaidan. He ended up nudging him in the side regardless, and Kaidan made this little sound in his sleep and curled up in the warm spot James had left. His hair was a mess, and when he turned his head, James saw another trail of hickeys all over the other side of his neck.

He was *not* telling Cortez about this. Cortez would probably laugh for five minutes straight, then slap him on the back and offer to buy him a drink next weekend.

Maybe he *should* tell Cortez about this.

He dressed quickly in the dark, made sure he had his phone in his pocket, and took the walk of shame back to his dorm before the sun even rose. Cortez barely stirred when James opened the door to their room, and James shimmied out of his jeans and flopped onto the bed, ready to pass out and forget this ever happened.

Unfortunately, morning brought a predictable hangover and many only-somewhat-unpleasant memories of what last night’s events had held. Kaidan’s teeth on his neck, Kaidan’s lips just barely brushing his as both of them breathed hard, grinding on each other with only a mess of pre-come and hand lotion that wasn’t supposed to be lube between them, Kaidan’s dick—fuck, he didn’t want to think about anyone’s dick right now.

“Wild night?” said Cortez, who (damn him) was already awake with tea in a rainbow mug and a smile on his face.

“Stop grinning like that, Esteban, your teeth are gonna blind me,” James said.

“You didn’t get home ’til what, four A.M.?”

“Something like that.” James lumbered over to the sink to wash out the stale alcohol taste from his mouth. And also the stale someone-else’s-spit taste. In times like these, James made extra sure to brush his tongue and use mouthwash for a good thirty seconds longer than usual.

When he finally looked at himself in the mirror, he realized he wasn’t wearing the T-shirt he’d gone out in. And, given that he didn’t own any plain black V-necks that were a little too small for him, this had to be Kaidan’s shirt. Hopefully, Cortez didn’t notice that. He took it off before Cortez was able to notice that. Cortez whistled and James tossed the shirt at him. “What?”

“Who’s the vampire?”

“Vampire?”

Cortez gestured at the side of his neck. “Yeah, the vampire.”

“Oh, uh. Nobody.” James dug through his drawers for a hoodie so he could at least somewhat hide the bruises on his neck. He found one, and a pair of sweatpants that didn’t match it and put them on while Steve went through a variety of disbelieving facial expressions that involved a lot of raised eyebrows.

“Nobody, huh? Strange, you’re normally so forthcoming about your conquests.”

“And you’re normally so... I dunno. Shut up, Esteban.”

“So, what, was she that ugly?”

“Something like that,” James said, and proceeded to curl up on his bed and watch stupid videos instead of doing his homework.

Chem class was going to be awkward on Monday.

Like every other college student in the universe, Kaidan hated Mondays. His Monday morning Chemistry class normally didn't make things worse (Kaidan was good at science, he could breeze through it half-asleep and still do fine on the tests so long as he studied once he was actually awake later), but he normally sat next to one James Vega.

Not today, though. Today, James showed up late and took the seat closest to the door, rather than walking across the lecture in progress to the table where he normally sat with Kaidan. Even from here, Kaidan could see a smattering of two-day-old bruises on James' neck. He fidgeted with his scarf (at least he'd worn one, instead of showing it all off), knowing he had a matching set, and they were shaped like James's mouth.

He turned just a little red when he saw James glance at him and then press his fingertips against the bruises. He was sure that if he were closer, he would've seen James's throat work as he swallowed. He remembered feeling that motion under his lips.

Kaidan was officially fucked, and not in a good way.

He knew James was mostly straight, and just drunk enough to get on whoever was nearby and willing. There wasn't going to be a round two, and as much as Kaidan wanted to catch him after class and ask him if he wanted to go out for a coffee date, there was no way he'd say yes.

And they were still planning on studying together this weekend, as far as Kaidan knew.

He zoned out for most of the lecture, mostly because he couldn't stop thinking about James, like he was back in middle school with his first crush. He didn't have *feelings* for James. He'd simply ended a six-month dry spell he'd been on since he broke up with Shepard, and just because he was used to being emotionally attached to someone he was sleeping with, it didn't mean he had to be.

James caught him when class was over, right before Kaidan was supposed to meet Liara for lunch. It was just a quick, "hey, Kaidan," like normal, but

Kaidan probably jumped about two feet and looked at him like he'd just slapped him on the ass or something.

"Yeah?"

James took a step back, probably getting the hell away from Kaidan's weird.

"Just wanted to know if we were still good for Friday," James said.

"Oh. Friday. Sure," Kaidan said.

"Cool. Because I totally don't understand this orbital thing."

"I don't think anyone understand that at first." What the hell did that even mean? James laughed, but it was probably a pity laugh. "Hey, uh, I've got a thing," Kaidan said, because he saw Liara a few feet away, looking smug.

"Yeah, no worries, man, I'll see you Friday at mine," James said. Right. They were meeting at his dorm. Kaidan definitely wasn't nervous about that. He waved awkwardly to James and escaped to Liara, who still had a particularly Asari smirk on her face.

"What?" Kaidan said, folding his arms.

He knew Liara had been at the party on Saturday. He also knew she'd probably seen him making out with James against a wall. *Jesus, Drunk Kaidan, what the hell were you thinking?*

"That's the guy, isn't it?" Liara asked.

"If you mean the one I got drunk with last weekend, yeah, that's the guy," Kaidan said.

"Got drunk with. Right," Liara said, as they started toward the student center. "Is that what you getting drunk looks like?"

"Yes. I party so hard, Liara." Turning it into a joke would have worked great, if he was talking to anyone other than Liara. Unfortunately, Kaidan

had very few non-Liara friends at Alliance. Oh Ash, why did you have to transfer?

“I’m just saying, it’s been half a year since Shepard, and she’s been moving on too, so you should go for it,” Liara said.

“Can we maybe not add Shepard into this... discussion?” Kaidan knew Liara was still friends with Shepard, but he hadn’t spoken to her aside from casual small-talk since the break-up. “Anyway, whatever this is with James isn’t going anywhere, so you can stop making that face.”

Liara kept making that face.

Even though Kaidan was reluctant to go over to James’s that Friday to study, he was even more reluctant to stay in his room while Jacob was hanging out with that weird Asian girl who had a huge thing for him. Kaidan was pretty sure she was the one who snuck into the school library in the middle of the night and defaced the statue of the founder in the middle of the lobby (the only reason he was sure of that, though, was because Shepard had been with him that night and hadn’t been available to cover a statue in frilly underwear and spray cheese).

James lived in the oldest dorm on-campus, an antique building that was pretty on the outside, but aged and a little gross on the inside from years of college guys living in there. It was easier to navigate than the Biotics dorm, though, and Kaidan found James’ room easily enough that he couldn’t even show up a little late claiming he’d gotten lost.

He knocked, even though the door was open a crack.

“Come in,” called a voice that wasn’t James.

Kaidan just hoped someone else being there would make things a little less awkward. James’s roommate was sitting at his desk, and he looked up at Kaidan through a pair of black thick-framed glasses and smiled brilliantly. “Hey, you must be Vega’s study buddy,” he said. “Steve Cortez. James is in the shower.”

“Oh. That’s, uh, that’s cool, I guess,” Kaidan said. He hoped James wasn’t one of those people who wandered around his dorm room in a towel. Kaidan’s freshman roommate had been like that. And this time, it was probably going to be less gross and more, “god, I’ve *licked* those muscles.”

James, thankfully, was not one of the people. He looked a lot different with the fauxhawk wet and slicked back, and he was wearing a black T-shirt that... was that Kaidan’s? Kaidan knew James had accidentally taken his shirt when he snuck out in the middle of the night, but he also knew he was probably reading too much into this. A ton of people probably owned a black V-neck, and James was always wearing shirts that were way too tight on him.

“Hey,” James said.

“Hey,” Kaidan said back.

Kaidan caught Steve rolling his eyes in his peripheral. “As riveting as this conversation is,” Steve said, “I’m going to call my fiancé, if that’s not going to interrupt your studying.”

“Yeah, cool, tell him I say hi,” James said.

Him?

Kaidan didn’t know why a part of him was so surprised that James had a gay roommate. He ignored it. He was still not over the whole shirt thing.

The next hour and a half involved Kaidan explaining orbitals to James a half-dozen times until they finally found a way that made sense to him. James was smart—Kaidan didn’t need a study session to figure that out—but the way their prof taught things didn’t make sense in his head. When he finally got it, he cheered loud enough that Steve threw a pillow at them.

“Dude, you’re seriously amazing,” he said to Kaidan, grinning like he’d just solved all the problems of the world.

“That was all you, man,” Kaidan said, grinning and rubbing the back of his neck, which was getting warm. “We should make this a regular thing, though.” He probably shouldn’t have suggested it, but studying with James had actually been good for his learning process, and it hadn’t been *that* uncomfortable. He wasn’t about to ask James whether or not he was wearing his shirt, though.

“Yeah, I’d be cool with that.”

See? Not awkward at all.

Kaidan got back to his room that night to find Kasumi still over, still watching some stupid extranet video with Jacob. She was tucked into his side, one arm slung around him, wearing a sweatshirt with the hood up, her face shaded so Kaidan couldn’t see her expression, but he was pretty sure she was smiling.

He kind of missed stuff like that.

2. Things Not to do for a Totally Platonic Bromance

Summary for the Chapter:

James yells at Cortez about his gay feelings, and then everyone goes to a party and James has more gay feelings, and what does he do with them? Well. He bangs Kaidan again.

Notes for the Chapter:

Luke, my gay smut advisor, says I should limit this fic to one sexy thing per chapter.

Hahahahahahaha what kind of writer does he think I am. (Hint: every chapter gets more sexual than the last, that's how this game works)

James woke up with a boner. That wasn't new. What was new was the dream he'd had, more of a memory than a dream, about Kaidan grinning up at him before going in for a kiss, both of them naked and sweaty. The dream wasn't all about the sex, either, and maybe he would've been less weirded out if it was. He vividly remembered the way Kaidan had laughed before he pulled James closer to him, the way his voice went all deep and sexy. And it was that stuff that made him hard, not the phantom feeling of Kaidan's mouth on his chest or his hands on Kaidan's ass.

Shit.

Was he gay?

Way he gay *for Kaidan*?

No way that could be true. He definitely still liked girls. But he also definitely liked Kaidan. He glared at his dick. *This is all your fault*, he thought.

Okay, so technically it was also a little bit his *other* head's fault for getting plastered enough to send all his inhibition running, along with whatever

else kept him from getting it on with Kaidan Alenko up 'til two weekends ago.

He flopped back onto the pillow and groaned. He was still hard—apparently, questioning one's sexuality did nothing to stave off arousal—and he was *not* about to jerk off while thinking about Kaidan's smile or the five o'clock shadow he always seemed to have. Definitely not.

He did, anyway.

He felt a little bit bad about it afterward, but not that bad, because he'd been thinking about the time he actually fucked around with Kaidan, not just fantasizing. Even though there was plenty to fantasize about. The man had the best ass James had ever seen. If Kaidan was a girl, James'd probably want to bite it.

James probably wanted to bite it anyway.

He glanced over at Cortez's bed. He was still curled up into a ball—reasonable, he'd been on the phone with Robert late last night. Plus, it was only like eight in the morning, and Cortez was all about sleeping in on Saturdays.

When Cortez *finally* woke up, James was just about ready to Google “how do you know you're gay?” or something stupid like that. “Esteban,” he said, as soon as he saw Cortez actually up and moving.

“What?” Cortez was already making his customary mug of herbal tea. He didn't drink caffeine, it was this whole health craze and James thought it was stupid, but he drank so much tea, his body was probably 90% chamomile.

“How did you first know you were gay?”

“Oh my god, James.” Cortez sat the mug down with a loud clunk.

“What?” James thought it was perfectly reasonable question.

“I thought of all the roommates I’ve had in college, you’d probably be the one I *didn’t* have to answer this question for,” Cortez said.

“Well. I mean. I just wanted to know,” James said.

Cortez yawned and rubbed his eyes. “Shit, Jimmy, I don’t know. Why are you asking me this?”

“I banged a guy.”

Cortez looked like if he was holding something, he would have dropped it. “You what?”

“I banged Kaidan Alenko.”

”*Kaidan?*”

“Yeah, you know, the guy who was here last Friday to study. Two weeks ago, there was a party, and I was drunk, and I banged Kaidan.”

“Dude, I know who Kaidan is. Just like... why.”

“Hell if I know. I was drunk. And I might be gay for Kaidan.”

Cortez looked as suspicious of James’s feelings as James felt. “You’re like, the straightest guy I know. Wait. Second-straightest. Joker is the straightest.”

“So why did I have sex with a dude?”

“Are you asking for my professional opinion, or do you just mean, like, as a gay dude.”

“Is there a difference?”

Cortez sighed and dropped into his desk chair. “I guess not. James, I personally think that you’re probably a little bisexual. But Kaidan? Seriously? *Everyone* is into Kaidan, why’d you have to sleep with him, of all people?”

“I dunno. He was hot and had his mouth on my mouth.”

“James, that’s not a good logical reason to fuck someone.”

“I didn’t fuck him! We just... you know.”

“Oh my god, I don’t want to.” Cortez spun the chair until he wasn’t facing James. “Can we never talk about this again?”

James slid off his bed and went across the room to turn Cortez’s chair around. “No, dude! You’re my best bro, you have to help me with my gay feelings,” he begged, and Cortez groaned and tipped his head back.

“James,” he said, dragging out the name. “Just. Okay. I have an idea.”

James sat back, realizing that he probably wasn’t helping anything by forcibly spinning Cortez’s spinny chair. He took a seat on the edge of Cortez’s bed. “Shoot.”

“Alright, so there’s this party this weekend. Apparently, EDI figured out how to hack into the sim rooms—you know, the ones where you take exams for piloting and stuff—and they’re gonna hold some kinda party in there. So, you come to that with me, I introduce you to some hot girls, and you get your mind off of all this... weird Kaidan stuff.”

“Hold up. Go back to the part where EDI thought of something as against-every-rule-ever as this.”

Cortez laughed. “Oh, the party was Joker’s idea.”

“That’s what I thought,” said James. “Yeah, I’ll go.”

There were way more people in here than there ever should have been. He knew the capacity limits on this room and they were so far past it. Kaidan was pretty sure that if a fire broke out, they were all dead. Unless, of course, it was a virtual fire.

He ended up going to the “VR mixer,” as the invite so cleverly titled it, because he heard from Joker that James and Steve would be there. Okay, so there was a little more to it than that: he knew that having a party in the VR sim room was dangerous and someone was probably going to get hurt or pass out and he’d *seen* someone pass out in the VR room (due to a panic attack, not alcohol, but still), and knew that you had to send the whole thing into lockdown if you wanted to shut it off long enough that you could get outside comms working.

Naturally, the VR labs had been designed to keep students from messaging cheats to each other while they were in-sim, but it meant no one (except maybe the VI Joker was trying to bang) knew how to call emergency services from in there.

And he didn’t want James and Steve (or anyone else) caught in the middle of that impending shitstorm.

So now he was in a VR sim that was way past capacity, surrounded by dozens people he didn’t know with at least three he did somewhere in the mess.

He ran into James and Steve while he was on his way to get a drink. Steve had an arm around a cute blonde girl, and the both of them were hanging out with a group of her friend. They looked like sorority girls, all of them curvy, white, varying shades of blonde (plus one brunette), and dressed in matching crop tops with Greek letters. Kaidan knew a few sorority girls. He liked a lot of them, and he tried not to stereotype them by their choices in college. But he just couldn’t get past the fact that one of them was actually *feeling up James’s muscles*.

And not only did he think her flirting was completely ridiculous and overdone, he was actually kind of *jealous*.

“This is stupid,” he muttered to himself. He needed more than a drink. He needed like five drinks. But, instead of going for the cockpit of the mock ship, where there were more bottles of Asari liquor than he’d ever seen stacked up, he walked up to James and Steve.

Steve leaned over and muttered something to James, who glanced up at Kaidan and waved. “Hey, man!” he shouted over the din of the crowd, and Steve wrapped his free arm around Kaidan’s shoulders and clapped him on the back.

“How’s it going?” Kaidan yelled back. James flashed him a grin and a thumbs-up. From the looks of things, James had his hand on the girl’s ass. “I was gonna go get a drink!” Kaidan said, and he saw James’s head bob.

“Yeah, I’ll come too!” he said, leaning over so the girl could kiss him on the cheek before he followed Kaidan into the crowd. Kaidan felt a weird thrill at the fact that he’d gotten James away from the girl. He forced it down. That was such a dick thing to feel.

Kaidan was surprised that a college party which wasn’t even BYO ended up having so much to drink, and that so much of it actually looked decent. No cheap beer or industrial-sized things of shitty vodka; this place was practically swimming in glowing blue liquor—Asari stuff that Liara sipped like wine and most humans could only handle taking in shots.

And, naturally, James went right for it, pouring a row of little plastic shotglasses—four for each of them. “You gonna do this with me, dude?” he asked. James didn’t look like he was feeling too bad about leaving his roommate alone with the sorority girls.

“Hell yes,” Kaidan said, but it was probably too quiet and breathy for James to actually hear.

James finished the shots first; he threw them back like he’d practiced it. Kaidan liked the taste of the Asari liquor (it was rumored to taste like sex felt), but it went down like trying to drink liquid fire. He coughed after the first one, but handled the rest pretty easy, and turned over his last shotglass only a few seconds after James did his.

“Damn!” James yelled, pounding the center of his chest with one fist. “That shit’s... fuck, maybe I should’a poured less shots.”

“No, no, it’s good,” Kaidan said, but it was hitting him hard and fast. Not so much that things were getting blurry, but he was already drunk like he’d had way more than four shots.

James wiped a smudge of their chosen poison from the corner of his mouth. Kaidan wanted to kiss him.

Shit, that was stupid, though. James was probably gonna head back over to that group of sorority girls and make out with one of them, because Kaidan was second to actual female attention.

“You wanna go find Cortez?” James hollered, and Kaidan nodded. He didn’t really want to go find Cortez.

And they didn’t.

Cortez (and the sorority girls) had moved on, apparently, and James checked his messages to see if Cortez had given any mention of where they went. “He say anything?” Kaidan asked, mostly mouthing the words. James just shook his head.

“He texted me, but... he’s being an ass.” James had to lean close for Kaidan to hear him, close enough for Kaidan to smell his cologne, and he had a hand on Kaidan’s shoulder. “Told me to get drunk myself.”

“Looks like you’re stuck with me,” Kaidan said, and he couldn’t keep the grin off his face. When James looked up, his forehead bumped against Kaidan’s. He tipped his chin forward like he was about to kiss Kaidan, but then he drew back and cleared his throat.

“Yeah, looks like I am.”

Another line of shots later, someone was yelling about body shots, and Kaidan was a few seconds away from agreeing to it (of *course* he was the subject in question, because Joker was a dumb asshole). Instead, James leaned over, and Kaidan could feel the whole line of James’s chest against his back, even hotter than the general temperature of a VR room full of college students. His cheek brushed Kaidan’s neck, and then his lips were

against Kaidan's ears as he whispered something about getting out of here. Kaidan wasn't sure what he responded with. All he knew was that he nodded, and that James grabbed his chest like he was groping a girl.

"Getting out of here" involved slipping out the front door of the sim room and into the hallway, where James didn't look twice before putting his hands on Kaidan's shoulders and kissing him with force. Kaidan took a step back, but made sure to drag James with him, until his back was against the wall. He supposed this was even, considering he'd shoved James into a wall last time. Now, though, instead of being in a party with a bunch of onlookers (some cheering), they were in the half-lit hallway outside the sim room, fluorescent light strips buzzing. Kaidan had walked down this hall to take tests since Freshman year. He never imagined being kissed there.

James moaned into his mouth and hitched his hips against Kaidan's. It was different than last time, less exploratory and more *dirty*, James already thrusting against him and Kaidan feeling him up under his shirt with one hand and grabbing his ass with the other. Everything was loud in the sudden quiet they were in, the noise of the party completely blocked out by the insulating walls of the VR room. The sound of their lips meeting practically echoed in the hall, and when James moaned Kaidan's name, it was the loudest thing he'd ever heard. He leaned back, squeezed James's ass, and James's head dropped 'til his forehead was against Kaidan's. He was smiling.

"God, I wanna fuck you," Kaidan sighed against James's lips, and James kissed him quick, hard, licked Kaidan's lips as he drew back.

"Hell yes. Oh, *hell* yes."

"So. Your place or mine?" Kaidan couldn't really believe what was happening. He was busy internally freaking out, and he didn't think he'd stop anytime soon.

James laughed at the cheesy line. "Your roommate gone again?"

"Yeah," Kaidan said. Jacob was at Kasumi's for the weekend. "Yeah, c'mon."

James followed him out of the building the VR room was in, and Kaidan couldn't keep from laughing when James grabbed his ass on the way out the door. His dorm was closer to the VR building than James's, and they got there quickly, but the elevator ride had the potential to be awkward, because the Biotics dorm had the world's slowest elevator.

It became probably the sexiest elevator ride ever once James actually *picked Kaidan up* and pushed him against the wall of the elevator, so that he would've been just about sitting on the metal bar that went all the way around the lift, except that James was holding him with both hands on his ass. Kaidan held himself up by James's shoulders, kissed him like he wasn't about to do it four dozen more times as soon as they got to his room, like it was some cheesy last kiss in a movie, like he had to get it perfect.

It *was* perfect, until the doors slid open long before they reached Kaidan's floor and some confused-looking girls in pajamas and matching first-year Biotics division hoodies caught them dry-humping in an elevator.

James huffed a very unconvincing, "shit, sorry," set Kaidan down, and unsubtly wiped his mouth with his thumb and the back his knuckles. They continued the rest of the ride up with three freshmen girls in tow, and Kaidan tried hard not to make eye contact.

Kaidan had been party to quite a few awkward moments in his life, enough that he was convinced he attracted uncomfortable situations. This, though. This was worse than anything else he'd experienced, because he was still hard as fuck and wanted to jump James's bones, even though there was a trio of freshman girls looking at them, probably wondering how the hell there were two people stupid enough to make out in the elevator.

Could they tell he was really drunk? They could probably tell he was really drunk. James was really drunk too. And his lips were all red and swollen from making out with James all the way over here and *god*, he was hard. The elevator wasn't that big, either, so James was pressed against him from hip to shoulder.

Finally, they reached Kaidan's floor, and thankfully, the girls didn't follow them out of the door. Kaidan glanced over his shoulder at James, who was

still grinning at him, and looked like nothing in him had been deterred by their momentary interruption. “Okay, so I can cross making out in an elevator off my bucket list,” he said.

“You ass.” Kaidan shoved him in the shoulder.

“Yeah, yeah,” James said, leaning forward to grab Kaidan for a quick kiss. It was things like this that had Kaidan feeling almost *romantic*. He forced that down. This was a lucky sequel to a one-night stand. “Where’s your room?”

“If you’d stop attaching your face to mine, I could actually find it.”

“Find it? You’re that drunk?”

“I mean, we did do eight shots in just a couple hours,” Kaidan said, keying them into his room. His hand naturally reached for the light switch, but he dropped it as soon as James stepped up behind him, and dropped his jacket onto the floor near the door instead.

James stripped off his T-shirt and sat on Kaidan’s bed, knees spread wide. Huh. He remembered which one Kaidan’s was. He’d kicked off his shoes, too. Kaidan did the same and crossed the room until he was standing between James’s legs, bent down to kiss him for a few moments. James started kissing his neck, and Kaidan wondered if he’d need to add to his scarf collection if this kept happening. More than anything, he enjoyed the feeling of James’s teeth scraping over his collarbone and James’s hands on his ass. He bit down on his bottom lip around a long moan, and his fingers tightened over the muscles of James’s shoulders.

“Fuck, are we gonna do this already?” James breathed hard into Kaidan’s neck, moving forward until he was balanced on the edge of the bed, and could slip one of his thighs between Kaidan’s legs and grind up.

“Holy—*James*,” Kaidan moaned, rolling his hips down to grind against James’s thigh. He did it a few more times before abruptly taking a few steps back and stripping out of his jeans and boxers simultaneously. “Take your clothes off,” he said, and he could see the flash of James’s grin in the dark.

James stripped out of his pants and boxers, and any hesitation Kaidan may have had disappeared as soon as James bent forward and kissed his stomach.

“God, your abs,” James sighed, and Kaidan felt himself shiver a little under James’s breath. “Seriously, what is your workout routine like?”

“Really?” Kaidan frowned down at him.

“Later, then.” James grabbed his ass and pulled him close, until there was nothing he could do other than straddle James. He pushed James back with a hand on the center of his chest and bent low to kiss his throat. James’s hands were all over, his chest, stomach, ass, but he didn’t touch Kaidan’s cock except for a slight brush of his knuckles on the way to grip his thighs.

“Fuck, would you just touch me?”

James paused for a moment before going for it, like he was collecting himself, or figuring out how to do it. When he finally did, though, Kaidan dropped his forehead to James’s shoulder, hips rolling so he could fuck James’s hand. James’s chest was rising and falling under Kaidan’s hands, the pattern only interrupted when he breathed in deep and exhaled with a curse in Spanish and a, “just get in me already.”

Kaidan drew his head back up. “You sure? You haven’t, um... done this before, have you?”

“Nah, man, I have,” James said, his hands dropping to Kaidan’s thighs, “I was with a girl once who was into pegging, and, uh... yeah, been there, done that.”

“Seriously?”

“Try anything once, right?”

Kaidan couldn’t help but laugh. It was half-nerves—was this another of James’s “try anything once” moments?

“You’ve got lube, right?” James asked after a pause.

“What a sexy way to ask,” Kaidan said flatly.

“Hey, I’m efficient.”

Kaidan sat back, took a few steps to rifle through one of his drawers and find the bottle of lube and the box of condoms he’d bought a few weeks back when he was drunk and said he was finally moving on from his ex-girlfriend. He’d proven himself correct, too. “So. You know how to—“

“Yeah, I do. Give me that,” James reached for the lube, and Kaidan sat at the head of his bed while James knelt in front of him. “I’m just gonna do it myself, if you... I mean, it’s faster.”

“Oh. Sure. I mean. I like watching,” Kaidan said, hoping it sounded sexy. It must have, because James smiled and kissed him, and Kaidan traced the shapes of his tattoo as he watched James smooth lube over his fingers. He couldn’t really see as James reached around behind himself, but he saw the look on James’s face, the way his mouth dropped open when Kaidan knew he’d gotten his fingers inside himself. He was close enough that his forehead was touching Kaidan’s, and Kaidan almost wished the lights were on so he could see every expression that passed over James’s face in full light.

James laughed breathlessly between his moans. “Shit, Kaidan. This is gonna be so good.” He chuckled the condom box at Kaidan. “I’m almost ready.”

Kaidan practically tore the box in half trying to fish out a condom, but he eventually got it on, even with the distraction of James tucking his face into the space between Kaidan’s neck and shoulder, practically kissing him with every movement of his head. “So, uh. Is this... good? A good position, I mean?” Kaidan asked.

“You want me to ride you?”

He couldn’t help the nervous laughter that escaped him. “Yeah, yeah, we could do that.”

“Cool. I’m good at that,” James said, and Kaidan didn’t get much warning before James straddled him and shifted until Kaidan’s cock was inside him. Kaidan covered the desperate, utterly horny sound he made by kissing James’s chest, just above his tattoo.

Even though he was pretty drunk, he knew it wasn’t gonna last long. James had the leg strength to fuck himself on Kaidan’s cock in hard, fast strokes, and Kaidan kissed James’s neck, his tattoos, his nipples, laid his hands on James’s thighs so he could feel him flexing under his hands.

Kaidan never thought it would be like this—in actuality, he’d been trying not to think of it at all—James riding him like a man who knew exactly what he was doing, like he knew where all Kaidan’s buttons were and how to push them. James was mostly quiet except for deep, breathless noises that matched Kaidan’s in tone, until the combination of James kissing him sloppily up and down his neck and fucking himself on Kaidan’s cock had him moaning higher, his fingers running uselessly through the buzzed hair on the back of James’s head.

“I’m close,” he said, and James kissed him full on the mouth, messed up Kaidan’s hair completely, and if Kaidan was as much of a jock as James was, he might’ve been more impressed that it was all core movement that James was using to ride him. As it were, he was just blown away by how it all *felt*, and he probably would’ve started saying stupid, sappy things if James wasn’t so intent on occupying his mouth.

Kaidan tipped his head back and yelled, “fuck!” as loud as he could without pissing off whoever lived next door when he came, and he probably left some fingerprint-shaped bruises on James’s ass in the process.

James slowed down, kissed him almost tenderly, and Kaidan could’ve fallen for him right then if he’d had the presence of mind to realize what James was doing. “Fuck,” he repeated, quieter, his hands resting on James’s chest. His palms were damp, but James was pretty sweaty, too; he probably wouldn’t mind. Kaidan felt a little like he wanted to shake himself back into the present, and a little like he wanted to stay in this post-orgasmic high forever. He went with the former. “Hey. Let me return the favor?”

“No, I *definitely* don’t want to get off after all that.” The sarcasm dripped from James’s voice as he moved off of Kaidan’s lap. Kaidan felt a little colder with James gone. He stirred his loose limbs into action, got rid of the condom and directed James to the place he’d been sitting.

“I can, uh, blow you, if you want.”

Kaidan couldn’t tell if James was laughing, disgusted, or just plain overwhelmed, because he shoved a hand over his mouth and looked down like he was challenging the sheets to a staring contest. “Damn, Kaidan,” he said, after a moment, “I know you’re like, a dude and all, but that was probably the hottest thing anyone’s ever asked me.”

“You clearly have less experience than I thought,” Kaidan said, his snark returning when the buzz of his orgasm faded and he was left with just regular, not-that-horny, Drunk Kaidan. *Drunk Kaidan made horrible decisions, too*, he thought, as he scraped his hair back from his forehead and then leaned over to do exactly what he’d offered, despite James’s “I know you’re a dude, but” preface.

James nearly kicked him in the ribs when he came.

Kaidan hadn’t ever had anyone do that to him before, but it made him laugh, and it made James laugh, and he kind of wanted to kiss him, but his mouth still tasted a little bit like jizz, and his sheets were a mess because he’d pulled away to dodge James’s foot aimed at his side. He wiped his thumb across his chin and it came away sticky. He couldn’t keep the grimace off his face. Ew.

“God, James, control your reflexes, man,” Kaidan said, hopping off the bed and taking the few paces to the sink to wash his mouth out. He chucked a hand towel at James, too, thought about changing the sheets but he was too drunk and too tired to care.

“Sorry,” James said, not sounding sorry at all. “So, I take it you don’t swallow?”

“I don’t, uh, make a habit of it,” Kaidan said, not bothering to mention that this was only the second blowjob he’d ever given.

“Shoulda warned you.”

“Nah. It was good. You’re... It was good.”

James heaved a sigh that seemed more like exhaustion than anything. “Do you cuddle after?”

“I can be persuaded to,” Kaidan said. He looked over at James—this had been way easier when they just up and passed out after. “How did we both fit on here last time?” he asked, more to himself than James.

“Can’t remember. Come here. We’ll figure it out, dude.”

Kaidan figured it was a little selfish to be the little spoon, but he did it anyway, because James was so huge and warm, and Kaidan didn’t even care that he was a little squished against the wall. James’s bicep was surprisingly nice to lay his head on.

He woke up with his head on a pillow, though, James’s bicep nowhere to be found. Figures.

3. How to Escalate your "Situation"

Summary for the Chapter:

Midterms happen, Kaidan gets a migraine, and Joker brings a robot to a bar.

Then, everything goes a little wrong. Then a lot wrong.

Notes for the Chapter:

More smut but also more angst? I thought that was kinda balanced?

I'm sorry I hurt these lil bisexual boys.

James was *really* trying not to make a habit of sneaking back from Kaidan's dorm before sun-up. Two times didn't count as a habit, right?

Cortez seemed to think otherwise. He was awake when James got back (just in time for a beautiful sunrise, no less), sitting on his bed with his legs stretched out and his computer on his lap. He had one headphone in, the other hanging down—probably talking to Robert.

"Vega," he said.

"Cortez," James said back.

"You slept with Kaidan again, didn't you," Cortez said, and James winced.

"A little."

"A little? How do you bang someone 'a little'?" Cortez glanced down at his screen. "Robert says to tell you he finds this hilarious, by the way."

"Thanks, Robert," James grumbled. "Anyway. I rode the hell out of him."

Cortez was talking to his laptop again. "He says he 'rode the hell out of him.' I know!" He looked up. "He says you're pretty gutsy for a straight

guy.”

“Thanks. I dunno if I count as a straight guy anymore, now,” James said. He didn’t understand the whole straight or gay thing anymore. He was just starting to figure he never would.

Cortez pulled his headphones out in time for James to hear Robert say, “why doesn’t he just talk to the guy about it?”

“Dude, I can’t talk to Kaidan about it.” James sat on the bed next to Cortez, who moved his legs and turned the laptop so he could see Robert with his headphones in and his glasses on. James thought it was cute that he and Cortez both wore glasses sometimes—they were gonna be the cutest nerd husbands.

“Why not?” He honestly wasn’t sure if Cortez or Robert said it first.

“He’s... I dunno. He’s too intimidating. And I don’t want to fuck up whatever we’ve got going on right now. Not sure if my Chem grade could handle that.”

“What?” Robert said, and Cortez had to explain that Kaidan was tutoring James in Chemistry because James’s scholarship depended on his grades and he absolutely sucked at any class taught by Prof Solus, because everything he said went in one ear and out the other with a side of, “wow, he’s like, the nicest dude,” and a mental conversation on whether or not he could actually become BFFs with one of his profs, especially one whose class he sucked at.

“Are you interested in him?” Robert asked, while James was mid-train-of-thought about Mordin.

““What do you mean?”

“Romantically. Are you interested in him?”

“I dunno,” James said. “I mean, he’s a cool person. He’s smart, kinda nerdy, he’s hot, I mean.... if he was a girl, there’d be no question. I’d be all over

that.”

“And since he’s not?” That one was Cortez.

“There’re more questions.”

Cortez put an arm around him, a strangely comforting gesture in the midst of the craziness of the 6 A.M. Skype conversation. “You’ll answer them eventually,” Cortez said. “For now, just... maybe stop sleeping with him?”

“Might be a good idea, yeah,” James said.

“Smart,” said Robert.

James managed to avoid going to any more parties up until mid-semester (except for that one night when he had some beers with Cortez, Jack, and Sam), which meant he saw less of Kaidan. They were only together in class and during study sessions, both places where he could focus on the issue of “what the hell is chemistry, even?” instead of how Kaidan’s lips felt on his. It all worked out pretty well, except for the one time Kaidan stretched and made a sound that was a little too close to the one he made when he was about to come.

He headed back from that particular study group meeting to jerk off in the shower because he couldn’t stop remembering how it felt to kiss Kaidan hard while he rode him, his cock rubbing against Kaidan’s abs. He had to shove his mouth over his hand to keep himself from making an embarrassing noise when he came. He’d never live it down if Cortez heard him getting his rocks off.

Midterms were on the horizon, and James found himself in his room, sans one Cortez, studying for his Chem exam with Kaidan. He was sprawled out on his bed with Kaidan at the desk, and after a long round of Kaidan quizzing him and then explaining all the answers James got wrong, he noticed Kaidan dropping his head onto his hand and rubbing his temples. It was a motion he recognized—Mamá used to get migraines all the time when he was a kid. “You alright?”

“Hm?” Kaidan glanced at him, looking a little startled. “Oh, I’m getting a headache.”

“You say that like it happens a lot,” James said.

Kaidan leaned back in his chair, tipping his head back. “Mm-hm. I get them all the time. I’ve got L2 implants, they’re... sketchy, sometimes.”

James didn’t know exactly what any of that meant—it was all Biotic stuff—but he knew how shitty it was to have a migraine right before you had to take an exam. “Do you take anything for them?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Kaidan said. “I have a prescription for it; took some before I came over here. It’s just gotta kick in.”

“You want some tea?”

Kaidan gave him a weird look. “Tea?”

“Yeah, it helps. My mom gets migraines sometimes.”

Kaidan’s eyebrows would be meeting his hairline if he raised them any further. “You just don’t strike me as a tea-drinker.”

“Nah. But Cortez is, and I’ll just steal some of his.” James sat up and got off the bed, heading to the sink to fill up his coffeepot, minus the coffee.

“Yeah, I’ll see if it makes things any better,” Kaidan said. Part of James wanted to kiss Kaidan’s forehead, right on the wrinkle between his eyebrows. Instead, he fished out Cortez’s huge box of tea bags (he bought chamomile in industrial quantities) and let his mind be absorbed in the task of making tea.

Kaidan smiled brilliantly when James handed him the mug, and James found himself, dangerously, a little in love with that smile. “How is it?” James asked, as he made a mug for himself. “Cortez drinks that stuff like it’s water.”

“It’s good,” Kaidan said. “I needed a tea break, dude.”

“Yeah. Midterms are gonna be shit,” James said.

“Chemistry's gonna be the worst, I think.”

“You think? I’ve got a VR exam, I hate those.”

Kaidan frowned. “Mm, yeah, I have one too.” He folded his feet up under him and took a long drink of his tea. They were silent for a while. James decided he kind of liked Cortez’s tea, but it didn’t beat a latte. He flipped through his Chem notes for the thousandth time that night, because he suddenly felt like he needed to have something to do with his hands.

Once Kaidan finished his tea, he closed out his notes. “I think that’s all I’m gonna be able to handle tonight,” he said. “My brain is fried.”

“Yeah, same here,” James said. He wasn’t sure yet if this meant Kaidan was leaving, or if he was going to stay and hang out. “I think I’m gonna watch some TV, if you wanna...?”

“I’m gonna go,” Kaidan said. “I should get some sleep, it’ll stave off the migraine.”

“That's cool. I hope you feel better.” He watched Kaidan shrug his coat on and button it up.

“Thanks. And thanks for the tea,” Kaidan said.

He left a steadily cooling mug and a few scribbles in his neat handwriting on James’s notes.

And, mostly due to Kaidan, he passed all his midterms—even Chemistry.

“We’re going out tonight!” Liara announced, bursting into Kaidan's room not five minutes after he’d collapsed onto his bed in utter exhaustion after midterms ended.

“Nooo,” he whined, burying his face in a pillow. He’d managed to avoid getting a migraine; whether it was because he took the meds early on or because James made him tea, he wasn’t certain. The lack of a headache still did nothing to combat his exhaustion, though, and he’d just come off of a sim test that had almost gone very badly. He *never* wanted to be placed in a group with Miranda again. Her strategies were far too unpredictable.

“Kaidan. You finally finished midterms, it’s Friday night, and I want a drink. Do you want a drink? You could be our DD if you don’t want a drink. Let’s go!” She grabbed him by the upper arm and attempted to haul him up, but she wasn’t trying very hard, because he didn’t budge. “Come on, Kaidan,” Liara groaned, pulling harder, and finally getting him to sit up.

“Okay. Fine. Just a couple drinks, and I’m *not* driving. I’m beat.”

He put a flannel on over his T-shirt and walked arm-in-arm with Liara to the bar. It was a nice night, and even if he couldn’t identify constellations from Alliance Academy’s positioning, he enjoyed that the night was clear enough that he could see the stars. Jacob and Kasumi were a few steps in front of them, and Kaidan could hear Kasumi talking about her newest plan to deface some kind of property on-campus. She wouldn’t go into detail, because she knew Jacob was too nice not to warn someone in advance. Joker said he’d be meeting them later on, and where Joker went, so did EDI. It was always a little funny to have everyone in the bar staring at the little short, skinny guy hanging out with a gorgeous VI.

Kaidan liked his friend group. They had a favorite bar, the one they always went to after exams to celebrate. He wasn’t there so often that the bartenders knew him (or any of his friends) by name, but it was a comfortable place to be. They took the table they were staring to call their “usual”, a booth in the corner next to a tall, skinny bookshelf. Kaidan’s back was to the window, which he liked. He could see the whole place from his vantage point, and he steadily watched the flow of people at the bar while he nursed a beer.

After a while, he saw someone who looked strangely familiar. He thought he recognized the haircut, and he *definitely* recognized the tattoos.

“Who are you staring at?” Liara asked, leaning over so she could see from Kaidan’s perspective. “Wait. Is that the guy you’ve been... seeing?”

“I dunno if ‘seeing’ is the right word,” Kaidan said.

“You were over at his house yesterday night, right?” Jacob said.

“I was *studying*.”

“You should go say hi,” Kasumi said. “Joker messaged me saying he's on his way, so you’ve got an excuse to get up. Go look for him.”

“No. That’s stupid,” Kaidan said, finishing his drink and setting the bottle on the table in front of him.

“Go get another beer from the bar,” Liara said, nodding at James, who was still there. Oh. Steve was there, too. Kaidan had kind of missed him there. James just took up the entire room, or at least, he took up Kaidan’s entire field of vision.

He did want another beer. And he could say hi to James. Ask him how midterms went. Thank him for the tea. Yeah, that. “I’ll be right back,” he said, getting up a little too fast, so he couldn’t hear whatever commotion occurred in his wake. Kaidan tried not to walk directly toward James, but he was right in Kaidan’s most direct path to the bar. James didn’t notice him, though, not until he leaned over the bar and asked for another beer.

When he did notice Kaidan, though, James brightened right up and clapped him on the shoulder. “Hey, man!” he cheered, holding up his bottle to toast Kaidan.

“Hey,” Kaidan said. “Are we celebrating or mourning our losses?” he asked.

“Dunno, I haven’t gotten my grades back yet,” James said. “I’m toasting survival.”

“Amen,” said Steve, from his left.

“I’ll drink to that,” said Kaidan, and he did.

Kaidan invited James and Steve to sit with him and his friends once Joker made his way to them. “Crowded bars and brittle bones don’t mix,” according to Joker, so he took Kaidan’s window seat, and Kaidan ended up on one of several mismatched stools, sitting close enough to James that their shoulders were pressed together, and Kaidan’s hand brushed the back of James’s wrist every time he took a drink.

It was a good group, Kaidan decided. Steve got along with everyone; he was just one of those people, and he was nice enough even to laugh at Joker’s stupid puns. James and Kasumi were apparently in a class together, and they bemoaned their midterm sim together, then drank to completing it successfully.

They made their way through a few more drink and a lot more conversation, and eventually, Kaidan felt James’s knee against his. It progressed to James’s foot tucked behind his heel, and while Kaidan wasn’t really one for playing footsie, he could feel himself starting to go a little red. He wasn’t even one of those people who got flushed when he drank, either, so he couldn’t tell himself he was just tipsy.

At one point, when everyone was distracted by some hilarious joke courtesy of EDI, of all people, James laid a hand on Kaidan’s thigh and gave him a *look*. It was an “are we gonna do this?” kind of look. A “hey, do we officially count as friends with benefits?” look. Kaidan only hesitated for a moment before he nodded, squeezing James’s hand. He hoped his smile looked more like a sexy smirk.

Kaidan spent the rest of the night wondering how they were actually going to make this work. Jacob was, for once, not gone for the weekend, and Steve would be in his and James’s room. Kaidan never thought he’d find himself hating the dorm system for how difficult it made sex.

When he excused himself to go to the bathroom, James cornered him on his way out and he almost jumped out of his skin. “Hey,” he said instead.

James leaned forward and kissed him quick, like a promise for later. “Hey. I asked Cortez if he could hang with Joker tonight.”

“You did?” Kaidan tried to ignore the fact that James had his hand on his waist.

“Yeah, man, Joker has a single, and, I mean, Cortez, uh, he knows. That we...”

“You *told* him?”

“He’s my best bro, dude. I tell him everything. Esteban doesn’t share secrets; he doesn’t see the point in it, so you don’t gotta worry about it.” James’s hand was no longer on his waist. Kaidan worried that he’d fucked something up by asking; he wanted James to touch him again.

“I’m not worried,” he said. “Really, I’m not. I’m good. It’s... gonna be good.”

James nodded once, then a second time, seemingly to convince himself. He grabbed the back of Kaidan’s neck and kissed him again. “Hell yeah. It’s gonna be great.”

They stayed for another long while, and Kaidan was antsy enough that he started subconsciously bouncing his leg under the table. He didn’t notice until Liara laid her hand on his knee and asked him what was up. He just shook his head, and started doing it again despite himself.

Steve went home with EDI, who had an arm protectively around a very drunk Joker. The others got ready to head out, when Jacob glanced at Kaidan. “Hey, are you coming back to the dorm with me?” Jacob asked.

“I’m, uh, gonna hang out with James,” Kaidan said. Liara was making the face again. “I’ll see you guys later.”

They parted ways once they got back to campus, Liara still making faces at Kaidan as his back was turned and they walked toward James’s dorm. Joker, EDI, and Steve walked with them, because Joker apparently lived on

the first floor of the same dorm. "How much did he drink?" Kaidan asked, because Joker was still leaning on EDI.

"He's a lightweight," EDI said, "but also not very good at walking upright when he's sober."

"I'm *fine*," Joker persisted, and almost tripped over his own foot.

"Esteban, you're gonna have your hands full," James laughed.

"Nah, I think that's you, Jimmy." Steve slapped Kaidan on the back and sent them on their way.

Joker and his compatriots headed off down the hall, while James and Kaidan took the stairs to the third floor.

This wasn't like last time, when they were furiously making out in the elevator. Kaidan was brimming with anticipation, yes, but he was only a little tipsy, and missing the liquid courage to leave his nerves behind. When they reached James's room and closed the door, Kaidan thought about asking if he wanted to actually just hang out. He liked spending time with James. He'd even make tea.

"Are you okay?" James asked him, taking a seat on his bed. "You're looking... upset."

"Just nerves," Kaidan said. "I was pretty drunk last time. And now I'm... not."

James nodded. "Got it," he said. "You wanna come here?" He patted the bed next to him.

Kaidan crossed the room and sat next to James, kicking his shoes off before tucking one foot up underneath him. James touched Kaidan's shoulders lightly, ran his hands down his arms until he was holding Kaidan's hands. "What is this?" Kaidan asked. "Because I think we're past 'drunk fling' phase."

“Yeah,” James said, with a soft laugh. “I don’t think it has to be all hard and confusing, though, y’know? As long as we both want the same thing.”

“I’ve never really done the friends with benefits thing,” Kaidan said.

“Can’t be too hard. I mean, we’re already friends, and the benefits are pretty great.” James grinned. Kaidan squeezed his hands.

“They are,” he said. He shifted a little closer to James. “I’m gonna kiss you now.”

James leaned in for it, let go of Kaidan’s hands to grip the back of his neck while Kaidan kissed him, opened his mouth almost immediately, turning things from sweet to hot before Kaidan’s heart had a chance to flutter. Kaidan tipped forward until James was on his back on the bed, hands around Kaidan’s waist. James ran his thumbs along the shape of Kaidan’s hips, his abs. His shirt was up around his ribs, and he pulled James’s up, too, hands on his chest under his shirt. James pulled Kaidan’s shirt off over his head, disrupting his hair, and Kaidan tried to do the same, but gravity was against him. James sat up, pressed a kiss to Kaidan’s chin, and stripped it off himself.

The lines of James’s tattoos were familiar to Kaidan now; he could follow them with his fingers without really thinking, without really looking, as he kissed along James’s collarbone and down his sternum, his fingers trailing over James’s hips. He palmed James’s cock through his jeans; James was already hard enough that Kaidan could feel the whole shape of his cock. He tucked his thumb into the waistband of James’s jeans, dipping down just enough to brush the head of his cock through his boxers. James moaned when he did it, and he hooked his forefingers into the belt loops on Kaidan’s jeans and pulled him closer.

“I want you on top this time,” Kaidan said, as James slid his hands into the back pockets of Kaidan’s jeans.

“Oh, shit yeah, I’ve been, uh, thinking about that,” James said. “But I don’t exactly... I mean...”

“Spit it out, Jim,” Kaidan said, but he couldn’t keep from smiling into the crook of James’s neck.

James sighed. “I don’t have lube, dude.”

“Oh.” Kaidan wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting, but it wasn’t that. “Well, then, we don’t have to... We can just...”

“I mean, I can, uh, borrow some of Cortez’s. And by ‘borrow,’ I mean steal.”

“Um, I mean. If he wouldn’t mind,” Kaidan said. He sat back and curled up against James’s side for a moment. “This is weird as fuck.”

“Yeah, I know, right,” James laughed, “I’mma go get it,” he said, turning the corner into the bathroom. Kaidan thought it was pretty ballsy of Steve to just leave his lube sitting on the shelf in the bathroom—he didn’t think he’d ever be able to do with that as long as he lived with Jacob. He thought about taking his jeans off, but instead, he just leaned back against the wall with his knees up, one hand running through his hair. He released a long breath.

James walked out of the bathroom completely naked, and Kaidan couldn’t keep himself from laughing. “Dude! Really?”

“Hell yeah, thought I’d get straight to the point,” James said, sitting between Kaidan’s legs and kissing him, slow and warm. He peeled Kaidan’s jeans and boxers off, and kissed down Kaidan’s chest to his belly as he did it, stopping just when Kaidan’s cock bumped the underside of his chin. “You, uh. I wanna try going down on you,” he said. “Never done it to a guy before, but,” James grinned, “I’m told my oral skills are pretty damn great.”

“You don’t need to convince me,” Kaidan said. “Go for it.”

James was a little tentative at first, but the things he could do with his tongue felt *amazing*. He ran the tip of his tongue up the entire length of Kaidan’s cock, then flattened it out when he reached the tip, and sucked the head of Kaidan’s dick into his mouth. He pulled off almost immediately,

and it made an absolutely lewd sucking noise. Kaidan shoved his knuckles in his mouth before he made an even worse sound.

“James,” he moaned, tangling one of his hands with James’s, “you should, ah! You should put your fingers in me while you—*yeah*.”

James leaned back, his lips wet. Kaidan felt a shudder course through his body. “Dude, do you actually think I can multi-task that well?”

“I’m hoping you can.” Kaidan liked the lopsided smile James gave him. He had dimples when he smiled. Kaidan wanted to kiss them.

“I mean, I’m gonna try,” James said, reaching for the lube (Steve’s lube, Kaidan couldn’t stop thinking). He felt wet, cold fingers on his thigh before he felt them on his ass, and he shifted backward.

“That’s fucking cold,” he hissed, and James wrapped a much warmer hand around his opposite thigh and pulled him closer so he could suck the head of Kaidan’s cock into his mouth again, while his fingers felt up Kaidan’s ass. “Oh my god,” Kaidan moaned, “stop fucking around and put it in me.”

When James finally did, Kaidan moaned and grabbed his shoulder, could feel his muscles shifting as he moved his hand. James clearly didn’t know what he was doing, but it’d been so long since Kaidan had been fucked, he didn’t really care. He shifted his hips down so he could fuck himself on James’s fingers, let him know that he didn’t have to be so shy about it. The more attention James gave to fucking him, the less he focused on his dick, eventually just leaning his head against Kaidan’s thigh with three fingers in him.

“James,” Kaidan said, and his voice became startlingly soft, “fuck me. Come on.”

James took a few minutes to put on a condom and spread lube over his dick, during which, Kaidan familiarized himself with the space just under James’s jaw. He liked the feeling of James’s beard under his lips. “How do you wanna, um?” James said, holding Kaidan with one hand on his hip and the other on his waist, his thumb just barely tickling Kaidan’s belly.

“Let me just...”Kaidan began, nudging James away from him so he could turn over. He didn’t exactly want to do this facing James, felt like it’d be too... *everything*, and he liked the feel of James’s lips and teeth on the vertebrae of his neck and upper back. James’s thumbs played over his shoulder-blades, and he ended up tucking his forehead against the dip of one of Kaidan’s shoulders.

“Okay. Okay,” James breathed, slipping one hand under to press against Kaidan’s belly. “You ready?”

“Are *you*? I’ve been ready, James,” Kaidan said, and he could feel James chuckle against his back.

“Yeah, I am,” he said, “a little too ready. Trying not to, uh, finish this off too soon.”

“I don’t fucking care,” Kaidan said, pushing his hips back and feeling James’s dick slide against his balls and the underside of his cock.

James laughed again. “You say that now,” he said, and Kaidan felt him take a deep breath before he *finally* pushed in. “Oh, damn. *Mierda*. You’re tight. This doesn’t hurt, right?”

“God, no. It feels good,” Kaidan said. “Move your hips down, just—*fuck, there!* Right there, shit!” He gripped the sheets hard when he felt James’s cock ride right up against his prostate. He felt James’s teeth on his shoulder as he pulled out and fucked into him again, deeper this time, until his hips were against Kaidan’s ass.

James’s hands squeezed tight on his hips, like he was trying to keep Kaidan still, but Kaidan wasn’t about to go anywhere, not when the way James was fucking him was absolutely *perfect*. James kissed his neck and shoulders, a sweet counterpoint to his hard, surprisingly precise thrusts. “James, hey, touch me,” Kaidan begged, and James reached around him, dragging his hand down Kaidan’s chest to his stomach, finally running his fingers over Kaidan’s cock.

James moaned, losing rhythm a little as he jerked Kaidan off. He was talking almost constantly, but everything he said was in Spanish. Kaidan couldn't understand even if he tried, so he just enjoyed the low, almost lilting sound of James's voice.

James was still babbling in Spanish when he came, fucking hard into Kaidan and getting so loud, Kaidan was glad he didn't know James's next-door neighbors. He still couldn't comprehend any of what James was saying, except that he heard "mierda" over and over. James still had his hand on Kaidan's cock, and the combination of feeling James come inside him and the unrelenting motion of his hand had him coming all over James's hand.

"God, yes, yes," Kaidan groaned, burying his face into the crook of his elbow. He wanted to kiss James, wanted to pull him into his arms and not let him go. It was stupid—of course James had to get up, he had come on his hand and he had to get rid of the condom, and they weren't even in any kind of relationship where a tender kiss afterward was appropriate.

James did come back to bed and spoon up behind him, though, and Kaidan felt James's lips on the back of his neck, but he wasn't sure if it was a kiss or just an unplanned brush of skin on skin. Kaidan shifted back to press his body against James's front. "That was *hot*," James marveled, tracing his fingertips down Kaidan's arms and up his shoulders.

"Yeah," Kaidan said, as James's arm settled around his waist. "Yeah, it was so good."

He felt James breathe deep behind him. He fell asleep trying to match his breathing pattern to James's, feeling warmer with an extra body behind him.

James woke up to find Kaidan laying on his back, tucked into James's chest. The sun was already up, light streaming through his blinds and covering the room in strips of gold. Kaidan looked good in the morning light, soft and inviting. He had a little more stubble than the usual, his hair was mussed, and when James leaned in to tuck his head into Kaidan's

shoulder, he smelled like sweat and sex, a little stale but not bad. He was warm and the way the light played over his skin made his body even warmer. James thought about kissing him, all the way down his chest to his waistline, thought about sucking his cock again.

Maybe he'd wake him up with a blowjob. James would definitely want someone to do the same for him; that would be sexy as hell. But he wasn't sure if they were *there* yet. He wasn't even sure if he could wake Kaidan up with kisses, or if that would be weird, overstepping some invisible, unspoken boundary.

Kaidan stirred in his arms, turned to face him. James laid a hand on his chest, rubbing his fingertips on the fuzz there. "Morning," he said. Kaidan turned his face into James's chest when he yawned.

"Morning," he said, blinking and then squinting his eyes. "Shit. Left my contacts in. Ow."

"Oh, that sucks," James said. Kaidan sat up and rubbed his forehead, and James had a great view of the musculature of his back. He moved aside so Kaidan could get out of the bed and head for the sink to take out his contacts and get rid of them. The sink ran—Kaidan was washing his face.

"Do you have mouthwash?" Kaidan asked.

"Uh, yeah, cabinet over the sink," James said, getting his ass out of bed. He put on a clean pair of boxers (Kaidan may have been able to get ready in the buff, but James wasn't that confident with himself), and stepped up next to Kaidan, grabbing his toothbrush. "Figured I should, too," James said, and Kaidan nodded mutely, his cheeks puffed out with a mouthful of Listerine. "My mouth still tastes like dick."

Kaidan spit his mouthwash into the drain. "Charming," he said, his voice still sleep-rough.

James was kind of wigged out by the fact that he had Kaidan freaking Alenko completely naked in his dorm room, leaning over the sink and examining the two-day stubble had going on. "You'd look good with a

beard,” James commented, putting his toothbrush back in the blue and orange glass where it belonged.

“Don’t think I could rock it the way you do,” Kaidan said, turning and grinning at him. “You’d look weird without one.”

“I only grew it this past year,” James said. Kaidan was drifting closer to him, eventually close enough that he was nearly brushing James’s side.

“Hey. Do you want to go back to bed?” Kaidan asked, head dipped low, looking up at James through his eyelashes.

Did he ever. James nearly bounced back to his bed, dragging Kaidan along with a, “hell yes, let’s do this morning sex thing.”

“Oh my god,” Kaidan groaned, “you’re a morning person, aren’t you.”

“Yep.” James pressed loud kisses to Kaidan’s neck, just over a hickey he’d left there last night. The bed was still warm, and Kaidan was warm in his arms, his body still lazy and half-asleep.

“I can’t see for shit right now,” Kaidan said, “I’m like, almost blind.”

“Shit, really? Do you wear glasses?” James asked.

“Yeah,” Kaidan said, with a small smile that James kissed.

“Cute.”

Kaidan rolled his eyes. “Not cute. James, if you want to ‘do this morning sex thing,’ I’d recommend you cut out the glasses questions. It’s not sexy.”

James reached for Kaidan’s cock, which was already half-hard, and Kaidan dropped his forehead to James’s shoulder. “Someone sure thinks it’s sexy,” James said, and Kaidan straddled his lap and tugged at his boxers.

“Why the hell did you put these on?”

“I didn’t expect, uh, y’know. All this.” James awkwardly kicked off his boxers, struggling to actually get them off with Kaidan on his lap. It worked out in the end, although he almost kicked Kaidan in the balls. Once he did, Kaidan rubbed against him fully, kissing him with his dick grinding hard against James’s. “God. You’re like, the sexiest guy I know. Seriously, Kaidan, you’re so fucking hot.”

He felt a puff of air on his shoulder as Kaidan laughed. “You’re a dork, Jim.”

“I’m endearing,” James said, and Kaidan kissed his neck and shoulder, rolling his hips again to push himself against James. The bottle of lube (Cortez’s lube; James was going to seriously apologize for him and maybe make him some dinner) was still on the windowsill, and he popped open the lid and squeezed some onto his fingers with one hand, which was a major feat. He held both of their cocks in hand, and felt Kaidan’s fingers dig into his shoulders, just behind the crisscrossing lines of his tattoo.

Kaidan moved his hips, fucking into the circle of James’s hand, making these sweet little noises into James’s neck with every thrust. It felt so good; James knew he wasn’t going to last long. Kaidan’s dick was the perfect size to rub against the head of his with every motion. “That’s so good, Kaidan, god, you’re amazing, I’m gonna come,” he said it all in Spanish, and that had Kaidan moaning louder, holding him tighter. So Kaidan was a “talk dirty to me” kind of guy.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” he said, still in Spanish, “shit, you’ve ruined me for other guys; I’m never gonna get over this.” It was strikingly honest—it would have been more so if he didn’t know Kaidan couldn’t understand a word he was saying. James came whispering “mierda, *Kaidan*,” into the crook of Kaidan’s neck, and Kaidan’s fingers tightened in James’s hair.

“I…” he began, took in a deep breath like there was more too, it, but instead, James felt Kaidan shudder full-body against him as he came, adding to the mess all over James’s hand and thighs. When Kaidan drew back, he looked almost bewildered, and James wasn’t sure if his eyes were so unfocused because of pleasure or because of his eyesight. James

wondered what the end of his truncated sentence would have been (probably “I’m gonna come,” that made sense).

When Kaidan moved away from James, he covered his mouth for a quick moment, breathing hard. “Shit,” he said, when he removed it, “shit, shit, shit.” It wasn’t pleased swearing. James knew what pleased swearing sounded like. He’d heard plenty of it from Kaidan himself.

“Are you, um. Are you okay?” James asked. He moved slowly when he got off the bed to clean off his hand, watching Kaidan over his shoulder while he moved.

Kaidan didn’t answer him for a long time, just sat on the bed, cross-legged, his hand over his mouth. James felt nervousness fizzing through him. When he turned around to rinse his hands off, Kaidan had his head buried in his hands. “Fuck,” Kaidan groaned.

“Kaidan,” James said. He tugged his boxers back on because Kaidan had. “What’s going on? Did I do something?”

“No, it’s. You’re. Uh. I don’t think... I don’t think I can do this,” Kaidan said. He got up and searched around the room for his clothes with a kind of franticness, pulling his shirt on quickly. James felt like he couldn’t do anything but watch. Watch, and hand Kaidan his jeans.

“Do what? This conversation?” James found himself feeling hurt, but he almost couldn’t place why. He’d never had someone up and leave after sex before. And especially not like this.

“All of it,” Kaidan said, “I can’t do this. I thought I’d be—I thought it would be different. I can’t... I need to go.”

“Okay? Are you, I mean, do you want me to walk you back?” *Are you okay?* he wanted to say, but he’d already asked that.

Kaidan looked at him like he’d just asked something absolutely ridiculous. “No. No, I’m good.”

“Kaidan, hey. I don’t understand what I did that pissed you off, but I’m sorry.” James reached out for him, but aborted the movement, letting his hand drop to his lap.

“You didn’t piss me off,” Kaidan said. “I told you. It’s not you, okay, I’ll... I’ll just go.” Kaidan stuffed his phone in his back pocket and headed straight out the door, leaving James extremely confused and silent on his bed.

“What the hell did I do,” James said to himself, looking down at his hands.
“What the hell.”

4. How to Involve Pretty Much Everyone in the Situation

Summary for the Chapter:

Shepard shows up, Cortez calls James a dick, and Kaidan tries something he probably shouldn't.

Notes for the Chapter:

YOOO LAST CHAPTER I already have another fic I'm writing for these two I'm stuck in rarepair hell forever hahaha this is my fate.

Kaidan spent the walk back internally yelling at himself.

He'd almost told James, "I love you," as he came. What the hell was wrong with him? He was pretty sure that was high on a list of things not to say to a casual friend with benefits, and he was kicking himself for leaving without explanation, but there wasn't one. He thought about making some kind of excuse, maybe even texting James and saying he just didn't do the whole fuckbuddies thing a lot, but he knew no amount of floundering could fix this.

Jacob wasn't home when he got back. Kaidan was happy about that, because there was no one around to hear him groan in exasperation or see him flop onto the bed and bury his head in his arms, wishing he could forget everything that had happened this morning.

He was almost surprised at himself when he fell asleep.

James wasn't a fan of the "it's not you, it's me" argument. He didn't deal well with vague, and he had no idea what the hell was pissing Kaidan off, so he left his room to do something he did understand.

He found himself in the gym, counting out sets in the midst of an intense workout. James was no extrovert, just incredibly social, but college life

meant he was around people all the time, and the gym was the only place he never felt like he had to talk to someone. It was like his *zone*. And normally, he could free his mind of any other thoughts except for numbers of sets, his form, and the lyrics on his workout playlist.

Today, though, he couldn't keep Kaidan off his mind. He just kept replaying the moment Kaidan's face had gone from pleased to devastated, each time, wondering what was going on in Kaidan's head. He lost track of the number of pull-ups he'd done in his most recent set, and dropped off the bar with a loud curse. Some girls on the free weights gave him a sideways look.

He needed to stop trying to distract himself. He needed to think about this. He needed—he needed Cortez.

Cortez was great at reading people. He also wouldn't appreciate a very sweaty James walking into the room and demanding that Cortez help him figure out his gay feelings.

So, he showered at the gym and tried not to check his phone a half dozen times on the walk back. No texts from Kaidan, not even an excuse.

Cortez, thank *god*, was in the room, not still hanging out with Joker, and James flopped onto Cortez's bed next to him with a low groan, curling himself up into a ball. "Esteban, I think I fucked up," he said.

"That happens pretty regularly," Cortez said. He set his laptop to the side, though. "What did you do this time?"

"Something happened with Kaidan, but I don't know what I did," James said. Cortez gave him one inquisitive look, and James spilled the entire story, even the bit about how he was weirdly happy to wake up with Kaidan, and how he'd told Kaidan he pretty much never had better sex with anyone else. Cortez looked like he was torn between laughing and calling James a complete idiot by the end of it, and he settled for rubbing him on the back. "What did I do?" James asked, "did I break some unspoken gay rule?"

“I just can’t believe you told him all that,” Cortez said, “are you sure you didn’t just scare him off?”

“No, no, no, Esteban, I told him in Spanish,” James corrected himself, “Kaidan didn’t know what I was saying.”

Cortez flicked him right on the forehead. “Pendejo. Why didn’t you tell him you’ve got a crush on him?”

“I don’t have a—oh, fuck, I do, don’t I?”

“Hell yes, you do,” Cortez sighed, sounding utterly exasperated with him. “You’re a really stupid one sometimes, you know that?”

“Yeah,” James said, “I wanted to say something, but I think... I mean, he clearly doesn’t feel that way about me.”

“And how the hell do you know that? It’s not like you told him you have feelings for him,” Cortez said.

James groaned and Cortez let him lay his head on his shoulder, because Cortez was a great bro. “Yeah. Shit, though, that’s kinda scary to think about,” he said. “I’m not all... feelings-y like you and Robert are.”

“Funny you should bring him up,” Cortez said, and James could feel the guilt-trip in his voice. He tensed his hands on his knee. “Robert lives on a different *planet* from me, James. If I could see him right now, I’d go straight to him and tell him how much I love him in person. I can’t believe you wouldn’t take that opportunity when you have it sitting right in front of you. Or, uh. Right across campus from you.” He laid a hand on James’s back as he continued. “I know it’s absolutely terrifying to tell someone you have feelings for them, but... wouldn’t you rather get it out there instead of keeping everything so unfinished?”

Of course Cortez was right. “You should be like, a lawyer, or a politician, or have some job where you have to convince people to do ridiculous things,” James said. “I really wanna tell him, Esteban. But I don’t think he’s gonna want to see me.”

“James. Do you love this man?”

“I think it’s a little soon for—“

“Do you?”

“Ugh. Yes,” James groaned, tipping his face into Cortez’s shoulder. “I love him way too much.”

“Then you’ve got to try, right?”

“I guess I do,” he said.

As he sent a text to Kaidan, Cortez narrated with, “James Vega, hopeless romantic, trying to un-fuck his love life.”

Kaidan was in the middle of some homework when he got the message from James. He considered not checking it, then he considered deleting it entirely. He decided he owed it to James not to get rid of his message, though, and he opened it, tapping a pen distractedly against his leg while he did.

Kaidan, the message read, I want to talk to you. Not about what happened this morning, if you don’t want, but there’s something I need to say to you. It’s nothing bad, I swear! I just gotta say something. That was all. Kaidan wished he’d elaborated, because anxiety was already coursing through him. What would James possibly want to say to him after he’d walked out like a total asshole that morning?

He didn’t answer the text.

Jacob walked in and awkwardly skirted around Kaidan, who was still frowning at his homework and at his message from James intermittently. Kaidan wanted to talk this through with someone, but knew Jacob wasn’t the person for it. He kind of wanted to talk to Steve, but he didn’t want Steve to get stuck in the middle of all of this.

He didn't reply to James throughout the rest of the day, but he did hang out with Liara, which was a nice distraction. They were watching a movie in her dorm room when Kaidan got another message from James.

Cortez told me not to do this. But I'm bad at listening. Kaidan I really want to talk to you. I swear it's important.

Liara glanced over his shoulder. "Who's that?" she asked.

"James," Kaidan said, truthfully.

"What's he say? You should invite him over," Liara said.

"We, uh. I think we're fighting?"

Liara raised an eyebrow. "You think. What's going on, Kaidan?" she asked.

He thought about telling her. He didn't think about it for very long. "Listen, I really don't want to talk about it," he said, leaning back to continue watching the movie, without answering James.

"Are you okay? This isn't going to be like your post-Shepard... thing, right?"

"I was dating Shepard for six months," Kaidan said, "this isn't like that. I slept with James three times, that's barely a relationship. I'm fine."

"Okay," Liara said, but she didn't sound convinced, and neither did he. He was suitably distracted by the rest of the movie, which had a fairly engaging plot and good practical effects. Kaidan didn't get a chance to relax like this often, but on a Saturday post-midterms, he didn't have enough homework to keep himself working all day. And Liara was a good person to watch movies with, because she didn't care when he made some comment about how stupid the characters were being or whether the plot made sense.

And, blessedly, he didn't spend much time thinking about James. He did think about Shepard, though. Maybe he was just fucking around with James because he missed Shepard. Their relationship had been rocky, but he'd really loved her, and it made sense that he missed her so much.

He sent her a message near the climax of the movie. Just a simple, “hey,” but it made him feel a bit more... settled.

Shepard’s response read, *hey, Kaidan. What’s up?* and that was all he needed to ask if she wanted to get coffee the next day. She said that sounded good.

Coffee with Shepard made him feel like his life was normal again. No more weird midnight sexual encounters with a guy he only knew from class, no more unfamiliar feelings. He knew how he felt about Shepard, he knew he cared about her whether or not they were dating. And being back at their go-to coffeeshop with a pair of lattes and a tiny metal table between them was comfortable and familiar.

“I’ve missed talking to you,” Kaidan said, while Shepard took a long drink from her mug.

“Yeah, I’ve missed you too,” she replied.

Shepard asked him how he was doing, how classes were, and he kept himself off the subject of Chemistry class and James, even though a strange part of him kind of wanted to ask her for her opinion on it. Instead, he told her about his nearly-failed VR exam with Miranda, and she launched into a long story about her roommate, who apparently kept bringing home Krogan guys. “I mean, I thought I was a xenophile,” Shepard said, and Kaidan laughed. She smiled, and the dimples on her cheeks reminded him of James.

He decided not to think about that.

Shepard and Kaidan’s coffee date ended up with the two of them in her dorm room, sans her roommate and any of her roommate’s apparently numerous Krogan paramours. Shepard pulled a bottle of bourbon out of one of her desk drawers, and poured them each a little glass while they watched an old-school horror movie. Kaidan ended up warmly drunk and only half-watching the progression of the film, focused more on the fact that the two of them sitting lengthwise on Shepard’s bed meant they were pressed up against each other, and close enough that when he adjusted his arm, his skin

stuck to hers as he pulled away. He could probably twine his fingers with hers and blame it on the scary movie.

Shepard was texting someone during the movie, and Kaidan checked his phone out of habit. No new messages from James. It didn't bother him, not really, at least now he knew he probably hadn't offended James enough to get an angry text.

Near the end of the movie, Shepard's head dropped onto his shoulder. He remembered sitting like this in his dorm room while typing essays last semester, and even though it was just a friendly gesture, it reminded him of leaning over to kiss the top of her head from that position. And when she leaned back up to hit pause on her computer as the credits rolled, he couldn't help but smile at the way the light from the computer reflected off the curve of her cheek. He laid one hand on her shoulder, and as she turned her face to look at him.

He closed his eyes and leaned in. He knew the exact distance from his lips to hers, knew the direction she always tilted her head, knew exactly how her kiss was going to feel.

He didn't expect her to put a hand over his mouth, although he probably should have. "What the hell are you doing?" she asked, looking furious, her mouth set in a firm line.

"I... I don't know, I was just... nothing," Kaidan said.

"You totally do know," Shepard said, "you were about to kiss me! Dude! I have a boyfriend!"

"No I..." Kaidan sighed. "Yes, I was. I'm sorry, Shepard. I shouldn't have done that. Life has just been kind of... weird."

"Who is it?" she asked. She knew him too well.

"Do you know James Vega?"

“That huge sophomore with the mohawk and the tattoos? Calls me Lola? Cortez’s roommate?”

“That’s him.”

“What about him?” Shepard asked. She’ve moved back, she was distancing herself from him, and he didn’t blame her for it, not even mentally. He moved away as well, not wanting to offend her further.

“We’ve been having sex,” Kaidan said, “and I think I’ve fallen for him a little.” She gave him one look the Shepard look, the one that always made him spill, and he gave her the details of the previous morning, even showed her the messages from James. “I can’t just... I mean, he’s mostly straight, he doesn’t want a relationship, and I just can’t keep having sex with him. That’s... you know that’s not my thing.”

“Yeah, dude, I can’t imagine you ever having a one-night stand,” Shepard said, frowning at him. “Why don’t you just tell him that you don’t want to keep having sex if there’s not a relationship involved?”

“I don’t want him to get creeped out,” Kaidan admitted.

She was still frowning. “I feel like it’ll be worth it, though.”

Kaidan nodded, still staring at his unanswered messages from James. “I don’t... this freaks me out.”

“Text him,” she said, “or I’ll go yell at him.”

“Okay, fine. I’ll text him,” Kaidan said. He didn’t.

He continued not to text him for the rest of Monday and Tuesday, either, and Shepard, blissfully, left him alone with his feelings and his homework, which he was almost completely absorbed in. He was not thinking about James.

He was *not* thinking about James.

James hadn't heard back from Kaidan in almost half a week. It felt like almost half a year, though, and he was about ready to leave the gym, go back to his room, and flop onto Cortez's lap and cry a little, but only in the most manly way. Cortez would be okay with that, too, because he was the best bro in the world.

When he walked into his room, though, he found Shepard sitting on his bed.

What the actual fuck.

Cortez was at his desk, on his computer like there was nothing unusual going on. He did catch the quirk of Cortez's lips as he walked in, so he must have thought that whatever Shepard was doing was absolutely hilarious.

Shepard had her feet on James's pillow, leaned back with one hand behind her head, texting someone. She pretended like she hadn't heard him come in, but she must have, because he wasn't the quietest person in the world. "Could you, uh, get your feet off my pillow?" James asked. She still had her shoes on. "That's where I put my head."

"Oh, really?" Shepard said, sitting up and turning to face him, "because I thought you'd been putting your—" and here, there were air quotes, "*head* in Kaidan's ass!"

"What the... oh my god, Esteban, did you tell her?" James asked, looking behind himself at Cortez.

He shook his head. "Didn't say a word, Vega. Kaidan told her."

"Oh, well. Guess he didn't tell her everything," James muttered, and he turned back to face Shepard. "It's, uh, kinda the other way around, sometimes."

She hopped off his bed. For a pretty average-height woman, Shepard could make her body take up so much *space*. He backed down, already crazy intimidated. "Don't get me stuck on semantics. I just wanted the dramatic effect," Shepard said. "Anyway, Kaidan showed up all upset and missing

you, and I want to know what the hell you think you're getting into, toying with him like that."

"I'm—he—I'm not *toying* with him," James said. He knew that if he kept moving back, Shepard would keep advancing on him, until she backed him straight into the wall. She took another step toward him, and she poked a finger straight into his chest.

"Listen. I was Kaidan's girlfriend for half a year, and you clearly haven't realized this, but he's the absolute sweetest man," she said.

"I know that!" James protested, "Jesus, Shepard, you think I'm blind?"

"I think you're insensitive," she said. "I don't know what you did, but he fell in love with you, and I'm not about to let you hurt him. So, either break things off with him or I'll break *you*."

Shit, he didn't doubt she would. She may have been a toothpick compared to him, but she could snap him in half with one look, and his knees felt like they'd turned into liquid already. "I... I don't want to," he said, and his voice may have wavered a little, but he stood his ground. Cortez wasn't even pretending to be on his computer any more, he was watching them intently. James knew he'd step in if shit really started to go down, but he was still terrified and absolutely sure that Shepard could ruin his life.

"You don't *want to*?" She took yet another step closer. "What do you *mean*, Vega?"

He'd been through basic, and the Alliance Marines he worked for were nowhere near as bad as Shepard. She wasn't even yelling, but she was scarier than any drill sergeant he'd ever heard. "I mean," he said slowly, trying not to completely shake in his proverbial boots, "I don't want to break things off. I really care about him." He glanced at Cortez, who was giving him a look just like the one he'd given when he flicked him in the forehead and told him he was a dick.

"I love him."

“You—“ Shepard began angry, and then faltered. “You what?” She finally backed off, and James felt the breath come back into his lungs. “Wait, what the hell?”

“I tried to tell you,” Cortez said, shaking his head, “he’s got it as bad as Kaidan does. They’re idiots.”

“You two,” Shepard said, shaking her head, “are the stupidest guys I’ve ever known.”

James started backing up again, heading for the door. “I’m going to go,” he said, “I need to go. I need to—I need to go find Kaidan. Where’s Kaidan?”

“His room, probably,” Shepard said, “he’s been holing himself in there, pouting, because you wouldn’t get your dumb ass out of whatever internalized homophobia it’s been stuck in and go fucking kiss the daylights out of him—“

He didn’t hear the end of her rant, because he was already tearing out of his room and down the stairs, before running like a crazy person to the Biotics dorm.

He considered taking the stupid slow elevator. But he wasn’t about to deal with being stuffed in a metal box, full of anxiety, not sure whether Kaidan would even believe him—no, he was taking the stairs. All sixteen flights, up to Kaidan’s room.

James was pretty much *dying* by the end of the staircase, leaning on the wall for a minute outside Kaidan’s unit. A couple other guys walked past and looked at him like he was doing something really stupid, which he was. He was about to go profess his love—at volume, if necessary—for a nerdy biotic with the world’s greatest ass and the world’s worst eyesight, and he wasn’t about to do it winded and kind of sweaty.

The winded and kind of sweaty part would happen after, if things worked out really well.

His heart was pounding for a reason completely separate from his mad dash up the stairs when he pounded on Kaidan's door.

"Shepard?" Kaidan called, hoping it wasn't the only other human being he knew who would pound on a door that loudly. He wasn't really up to seeing James, especially not when he was in his glasses with an old Biotics division hoodie on and his hair still kinda greasy because he hadn't showered yet.

"Uh, not Shepard," James called from the other side of the door. Jacob glanced up. He had his headphones in, but they were kind of yelling their whole conversation.

"James?"

"Yeah, can I come in?"

Kaidan knew he probably shouldn't have gotten off his bed and gone to open the door. But he did, because if James was here to cut things off and explain that he just wasn't into dudes, he could slam the door in his face and it'd be really satisfying. Jacob looked back down at the paper he was working on.

"What?" he said, stuffing a hand in his hoodie pocket and wondering why James looked kind of sweaty. Had he just come from the gym?

"I needed to tell you I'm sorry," James said. Here it came. Kaidan's grip tightened on the door handle. "I should have told you how I feel sooner."

"It's okay," Kaidan said, even though it was nothing of the sort, "I get it if you just want to go back to being friends."

"What?" James looked baffled. "No, that's not what I—I came here to ask if you wanted to date me."

"You what?" Kaidan let go of the doorknob entirely. "Are you serious?"

“Yes,” James said, and the nervous smile he was wearing looked far too good on him. “If you say no, I’ll back off, but, uh. Well. I came home to Shepard yelling at me? And I think her yelling meant that you feel the same way I do?”

Kaidan was going to have to send Shepard a thank-you note and a bottle of wine. Like, a good one, too. “Yeah,” he said, and it came out quieter than he thought it would. “I do.”

James stepped through the doorway and kissed him like there was nothing else to discuss, like he wasn’t going to explain how he’d somehow gone from *James Vega: world’s straightest dude* to *James Vega: Kaidan Alenko’s boyfriend, probably* in the course of less than a semester. Like Kaidan’s roommate wasn’t watching and looking extremely weirded out. Like Kaidan didn’t have a two-day beard and terrible hair and a hoodie he only washed about once a month on. Like he’d been wanting to do it for weeks.

Kaidan put his arms around James’s shoulders and kissed him back like it was the answer to all the questions he could have asked.

Jacob cleared his throat behind them.

“Guys, I can like, go over to Kasumi’s or something if you need some, uh, alone time,” he said.

“Oh, no, you don’t have to—“ Kaidan said, at the same time James said, “yeah, dude, thanks.”

“I’m just gonna go,” Jacob said, and he slung his backpack over his shoulder and walked past James and out the door. “Have fun,” he called over his shoulder, and Kaidan couldn’t suppress his laughter as he dropped his forehead to James’s shoulder.

“I feel kind of bad for him,” James said, but he wrapped his arms around Kaidan’s waist anyway, holding him a little closer. Kaidan hugged him back, found himself overwhelmingly happy that he could lean into James and make things as sappy as he wanted to, could kiss him on the cheek and know James was smiling about it. He didn’t have to worry that he was

hugging him for too long or wonder what James was thinking, because he was pretty sure it was along the lines of his own train of thought.

“I’m sorry I never answered your texts,” Kaidan said, turning his face into James’s neck.

“Sorry I told you how fucking glorious you are in Spanish,” James said.

“You what?”

“I may have said that you’re the sexiest man ever and that you’ve ruined me for every other guy,” James said, and Kaidan squeezed him tighter around his waist.

“In Spanish.”

“Yeah. It was probably not the world’s best idea,” James said. Kaidan leaned back, and then kissed him again, a quick, sweet series of them that had James smiling at him when he pulled away. Kaidan looked at his dimples. Kaidan kissed the left one. “I like your glasses,” James said.

“I like you,” Kaidan said back. James kissed him again, slid one hand to the small of Kaidan’s back. “I really... oh, god, James, you’re right, you really should have told me sooner.”

“Kaidan,” James sighed, tipping his forehead against Kaidan’s. “I know I should be all romantic and stuff, but I kind of just want to make out for a really long time and possibly bang.”

“I’m okay for making out for a really long time,” Kaidan said, “but I’d like to amend that to definitely bang.”

They ended up on Kaidan’s bed, wrapped in the nest of blankets it became due to Kaidan’s sleeping pattern, which was something along the lines of rolling around violently for a good twenty minutes and then passing out. It was comfortable there with James, and Kaidan found himself smiling against James’s lips just as often as he found himself kissing him. He was lying on his back, with James curled around him on his left side, Kaidan’s

head tipped to the side, his legs tucked over James's and his arm under James's head. James kissed well, but he and Kaidan normally spent most of their kisses trying to get to the main event, as it were, so it was unusual for them to spend so long just *kissing*. It was like trying something new.

Kaidan's mouth was sore after a while, but he kept at it anyway, running his hands over James's chest and his biceps, while James rubbed his fingers over Kaidan's hips and sucked on his bottom lip. Eventually, James shifted so he was laying more *on* Kaidan than next to him, one of his legs slotted between Kaidan's thighs, and he moved from laying there to gently rubbing against him, shifting so slowly it could have just been subconscious adjustments. Kaidan was already half-hard just from kissing him, and he pulled on the back of James's thigh to adjust him further so he could really grind against James.

Kaidan was just in basketball shorts, and James was wearing sweats that made his ass look weirdly good, so it was easy for him to feel James's cock against his as soon as he got hard. Kaidan tipped his head back and James kissed along his jawline, his lips scraping over Kaidan's gross, stubbly beard. He felt James's fingers under his shirt, trailing up the center of his stomach to his chest, his fingertips rubbing through the black curls of hair there. "Oh my god, yes," Kaidan sighed when James sucked on his neck. He was hit with a memory of the first time James had done that, the two of them pressed against a wall, the thrum of music pulsing almost as loud as James's heartbeat under his hand was now.

Kaidan had been grasping for familiarity with Shepard, and finally felt that comfortable pleasantness now, a warm buzz at the back of his skull where James's fingertips were pressed. He smiled at James again, and James rocked forward, grinning at him and leaning forward in a continued attempt to find the best way their smiles fit together. Kaidan linked his fingers together on the back of James's neck, to pull him close and keep him there for a long time, shifted his hips down enough to push James's thigh tighter against his groin. James moaned, the sound mostly muffled by Kaidan's lips on his.

After a few long moments, James was rocking hard enough against Kaidan that the bed started to squeak (Kaidan had never known he had a squeaky

bed until James), and Kaidan had wiggled out of his sweatshirt and was now bare-chested against James, who was still wearing a T-shirt. It was one of those athletic shirts, and it stretched a little when Kaidan grabbed at James's back to anchor himself against the rolling tide of James's body moving against his.

When James got up to grab Kaidan's lube and the half-ripped condom box from his dresser drawer, Kaidan leaned back, scraped a hand through his hair, and marveled at exactly how ridiculous his situation was. He was about to make love to a man he'd previously only thought of as a straight boy who was experimenting with him, and it was going to be the first time of many.

"Hot damn," James said, leaning his hip against the half-wall that separated Kaidan's side of the room from Jacob's. "You look so good, babe."

"Really? You're actually calling me 'babe'," Kaidan said. James looked pretty good too, his mohawk flopped to one side because Kaidan had run fingers through it, his T-shirt riding up so Kaidan could see a line of skin between it and the waistband of his sweats.

"Oh yeah," James said, swinging one leg over Kaidan's body so he was full-on straddling him now, grinding down enough to make them both moan. James bent down, kissed Kaidan's cheekbone, just under his glasses. "You want these on or off?"

"Off," Kaidan said, grimacing, "they make things complicated."

"And by things," James set his glasses on his desk, just an arm's reach away, "you mean they make burying your face half-in your pillows because you don't like moaning loud enough for the whole dorm to hear complicated."

"Yeah, they do," Kaidan said. He couldn't really see James anymore, not until James bent down so he was close enough that his lips almost, *almost* brushed Kaidan's when he spoke.

“Well, I’ve got news for you, babe,” James said, dropping his head to kiss Kaidan quick before pulling back up, “I’m really gonna piss your neighbors off today.” His voice was all deep and sexy and it made Kaidan inhale fast, like he was bracing for something. What he got was James slipping a hand into his shorts to feel up his cock, and that breath he’d taken all rushed out of him at once as he tipped his head to the side so James could kiss up and down his neck.

“You really should’ve taken your pants off while you were standing,” Kaidan said, as James tried to awkwardly wiggle out of his clothes while he was still straddling Kaidan.

“Mmph. Yeah.” James said into the curve of Kaidan’s shoulder.

Even though Kaidan felt like he could just kiss James forever, he found himself impatient to get undressed, like everything was taking too long, and when James was finally naked and pressed against him, Kaidan just held him close for a minute, carding his fingers through James’s hair. “God. You’re kinda amazing, you know that?” James said it quietly, like his voice was gone. Kaidan’s laugh was just as quiet.

“I am not,” he said, and James ran his fingers through Kaidan’s hair and didn’t even look like he thought it was kind of gross.

“Yes,” he said, pressing a kiss to Kaidan’s forehead, “you are.”

Kaidan had been under the impression that having sex with someone you loved was supposed to be mind-blowing and completely different from anything else he’d ever experienced, but, mind-blowing as everything with James always was, it was pleasantly familiar. It was easy to bend to James’s touches, especially when he remembered how they all felt and knew what was coming next.

James had two fingers inside Kaidan when he started talking to him in Spanish, and Kaidan didn’t know what he was saying, but he assumed it was dirty, because James’s voice was pitched low and sexy, a little bit of a growl in it sometimes. This time, though, his rambling wasn’t all foreign to Kaidan—he interspersed the Spanish with English sentences, and

everything he said had Kaidan blushing and laughing a little breathlessly under him.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re so fucking hot like this,” James said, his breath hot in Kaidan’s ear, his free hand passing warmly over Kaidan’s ribs, over and over, like James was trying to soothe any lingering hurt the last few days had caused. “You feel so good, Kaidan, mmh,” James moaned into the space just behind Kaidan’s jaw. Then, it was all Spanish again.

“Mind translating for me?” Kaidan asked, when he could catch his breath. James was dragging his thumb up and down Kaidan’s perineum with his fingers still inside him.

“Shit, K, I can’t remember what I just said.” James laughed, pushed his middle finger against Kaidan’s prostate and made his whole body arch. “I think it was somethin’ about making love.”

Kaidan only had to stretch up a few inches to kiss James’s lips, and he was met with an eager response, James pushing hard enough against him that he dropped his head to the pillow again and James followed. When they parted, Kaidan laid both his hands on James’s chest and felt, with a little shudder that raced up the length of his spine, James’s fingers slip out of him. “I want you,” Kaidan said, suddenly able to feel his own heartbeat not only in his chest, but in his throat and his wrists and everywhere. It was racing. “I want you in me.” James dropped his head to Kaidan’s shoulder and mumbled something that Kaidan was pretty sure wasn’t words in *any* language.

“What did I ever do to deserve you,” James said, so quiet Kaidan almost didn’t hear him.

It may have been an inconvenience, but James managed to figure out how to put a condom on one-handed, because he was busy tangling the fingers of his other hand with Kaidan’s, because Kaidan wanted—*needed*—some form of contact right now.

And James must have known, either that, or he needed it as much as Kaidan did.

“I’m gonna—“ James said quietly, and Kaidan nodded. James bent over him, steadying himself on one forearm, just to the side of Kaidan’s head. If he tipped his head to the side, he could rest his cheek against James’s arm. James’s other hand gripped one of Kaidan’s thighs, pulling him close so he could line himself up and—

”*Oh*,“ Kaidan sighed, head tipping back, eyes rolling shut, James’s fingers tangling in his hair. ”*Oh*, that’s...”

“Better than last time?”

Kaidan opened his eyes and he could see James in decent focus even without his glasses. His eyes looked warmer up close. “Yeah,” he murmured, tipping his chin up to press his lips to James’s. ”Yeah, oh god, I know people bitch about missionary but I like being able to see your face.”

“Me too,” James said. He rolled his hips forward and Kaidan made this raspy, breathless little moan and dug his fingers into James’s shoulder. He was sure he would’ve left marks if his nails had been any longer than bitten-down stubs. As it were, he probably just left bruises.

James fucked him nice and slow, and Kaidan was pretty sure he was becoming addicted to this. He could hardly even hear his bed squeaking anymore, the noise drowned out by James’s breath in his ear and the low sounds he made. The thing that floored Kaidan most, though, was how sweet James’s dirty talk became—it went from, “you’re so fucking sexy, the way you move like that, the way you gotta hold onto me,” to, “god, babe, yes, that’s it, you’re good, so good,” in the space of a few minutes. Kaidan didn’t talk a lot during sex, but he liked when James did it, no matter what language he was speaking.

In this position, Kaidan’s cock was right between his belly and James’s, and he wasn’t going to last long, after all, how could he, when he was rubbing off on James’s perfect, cut abs. “I’m gonna come,” he said, as James started sucking on his neck, and James grabbed Kaidan’s ass and started fucking him *harder*, “I’m gonna—oh, god, *James*, oh, fuck, *fuck*, *I love you*.”

James completely stopped moving then so he could take Kaidan's face in his hands and kiss the living daylights out of him, and it really would have pissed Kaidan off if he hadn't already been so close to the edge that he was coming by the time James's lips met his.

"Kaidan," James sighed, tracing his fingers over Kaidan's chest and leaning in the few inches to kiss Kaidan again, like he couldn't get enough, like he was as addicted as Kaidan was. "I love you, too."

Kaidan smiled, and traced the line of James's cheekbones and his jaws, the curve of his bottom lip, while James kissed his bottom lip and the dip of his chin. "Did you," Kaidan said, and it was hard to talk while James was kissing the corner of his mouth over and over, "did you want to finish?"

"I already did," James said, "in you."

"Oh," his voice went soft again.

He laughed when James settled his full weight on top of him and refused to move even when Kaidan tried to wiggle out from under his body. "Dude, we're a mess, at least let me get a towel or something," Kaidan said, and he felt James shake his head.

"No, cuddles are more important than not being gross."

"You can shower with me if you want?"

"Stuffing two huge dudes into a college-dorm-size shower sounds like a terrible idea," James said, "so, let's do it."

Kaidan wasn't sure how he got into this situation.

Kaidan didn't get into *situations*, either, he just stayed home on Friday night and watched scifi movies with Liara while commenting on the bad science. This was beyond his expertise in every manner of speaking.

At least there was a man he loved pressing him against his shower wall and making out with him.

Notes for the Chapter:

Aaaaaand that's all from me! If you want to hear me yell about Kaidan but mostly about Dragon Age (just gonna be honest), my tumblr is @weezna (and my NSFW tumblr is @seldula if you want to hear me yell about Kaidan's butt.)

Author's Note:

Visit me on Tumblr @weezna (or @seldula for NSFW bidness) if you want to know more things I think about James and Kaidan.

For example, they're cute.